

Fig. 1: The original of this engraving was made in 1755 for a special edition of Stow's *Survey of London*. The viewpoint is from the east, showing in the foreground the subsidiary courtyard next to the Fleet. The Grand Staircase is in the left foreground topped by a belfry and alongside it the small gateway gave access to the principal courtyard in the background. Its symmetrical facade clearly indicates that it is the rebuild referred to. However, the dripstones over the windows and the four-centred arches in the subsidiary courtyard are Tudor Gothic and likely to be original.

Bridewell Palace

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*"Your Bridewell? that the name? for beauty, strength
Capacity and forme of ancient building,
(Besides the Rivers neighbourhood) few houses
Wherein we keepe our Court can better it."*

Thomes Dekker, *"The Honest Whore"*, Part 2, Act V, scene ii

DURING THE FIRST HALF of 1978 two sites² in the known vicinity of Henry VIII's Bridewell Palace became available for investigation. At 9-11 Bridewell Place the developers, Haslemere Estates

Ltd., permitted a two month programme that involved rapid clearance, some limited excavation and a machine trench. It revealed the palace's massive brick foundations but although a fairly large site

1. Introduction and 9-11 Bridewell Place by D. Gadd, 1-3 Tudor Street by Alan Thompson.
2. Undertaken by the Department of Urban Archaeo-

logy of the Museum of London, with considerable assistance from the City of London Archaeological Society.

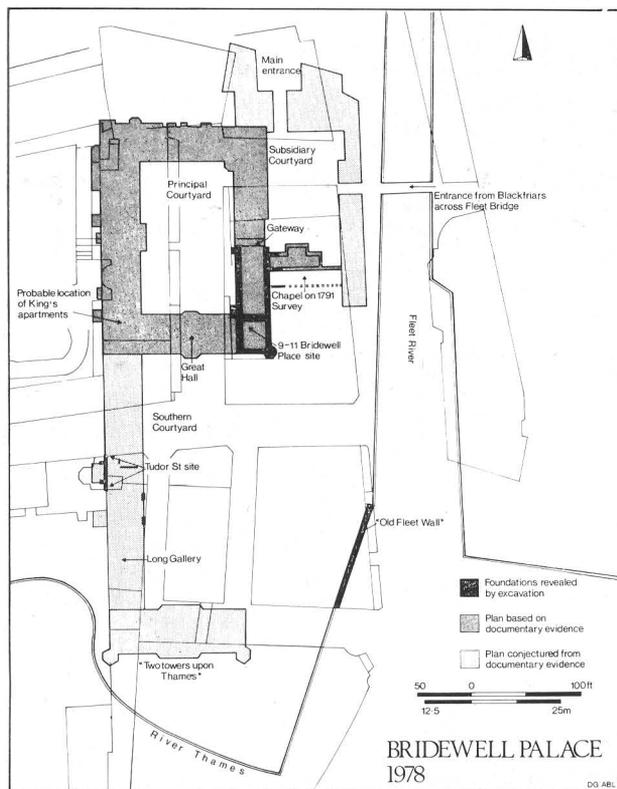


Fig. 2: The overall plan of the palace is based on that prepared by Howard Colvin, but incorporating the recently excavated evidence. The principal courtyard is taken from the 1791 survey and the evidence from the 9-11 Bridewell Place site. The southern courtyard is based on the questionable representations in Agas' and Hoefnagel's maps and the Tudor Street evidence while the subsidiary courtyard is largely conjectural. The waterfront is reconstructed from Leake's map of 1666 and a presumed revetment wall called the Old Fleet Wall recorded on the alteration plans of Blackfriars House (1973). (Drawn by Alison Balfour-Lynn)

(35 x 15m or 115 x 50ft) it comprised only about five per cent of its total area. The other site at 1-3 Tudor Street² was a watching brief, conducted over a period of months, which produced further fragments of foundations. These could be related to the Bridewell Place evidence and, using existing cartographic and pictorial sources, suggest the overall plan of the palace (Fig. 2).

The palace is known to have been built between 1515 and c. 1523. The need for it arose when fires destroyed both the old palace of Westminster and the Royal apartments in the Tower in 1512 leaving the King without a useable residence in his capital city. It remained Henry's principal palace for some years during which time it saw some notable events. In 1522 shortly before the palace was completed it

provided accommodation for the entourage of nobles accompanying the Emperor Charles V on his visit to London. Six years later Henry and Katherine of Aragon stayed there while the papal legates deliberated on their divorce proceedings in the house of the Blackfriars on the other side of the Fleet. Most of Act III of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* which concerns those events is set in Bridewell. With Wolsey's fall from grace in 1529 his palaces at York Place (Whitehall) and Hampton Court came into the possession of the King and Bridewell was given over to those ambassadors, mainly French, whom the King wished especially to favour. It was at that time that Hans Holbein the younger painted his famous portrait *The Ambassadors* there. Its brief history as a royal palace was brought to an end in 1553 by Henry's son Edward VI who gave it to the city as a workhouse, prompting Dekker's epigram quoted at the end of the article. Before its complete demolition in 1863 its uses varied between hospital, prison, house of correction and warehouse.

Recent comprehensive work by Howard Colvin on the documentary evidence has done much to clarify the misconceptions of earlier writers³ and has resulted in an excellent synthesis⁴. Unfortunately, though, the number of documents that have come down to us is small. There are no detailed building accounts, only a few estimates and accounts in the State Papers. Likewise the pictorial representations are not particularly useful. The prospect views from the maps of Agas (1561-70) and Hoefnagel (c. 1572) appear to show the whole palace but are sketchy and unreliable, while the earliest detailed engraving (Fig. 1) shows only a small amount of the original palace. The most useful piece of evidence is a room-by-room survey made in 1791 (Fig. 3) but the palace had undergone wholesale modification and re-building by then. Most importantly it does not show the southern quadrangle which was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and not rebuilt. The palace was laid out around two main courtyards (see Fig. 2): the principal courtyard to the north with the Great Hall along its southern side whence a Long Gallery ran down to "two towers upon Thames"⁵. These with a high wall down the eastern side enclosed the

3. E. G. O'Donoghue, *Bridewell Hospital*, (London 1923). A. J. Copeland, F.S.A., *Bridewell Royal Hospital* (London 1888).

4. Howard Colvin (ed.), *History of the Kings Works*, volume forthcoming.

5. From a repair account of 1534 quoted in Colvin (ed.) *op cit*. An elaborate structure as depicted by Agas and Hoefnagel, the two towers refer to stair turrets at the corners, either side of a large central oriel window.

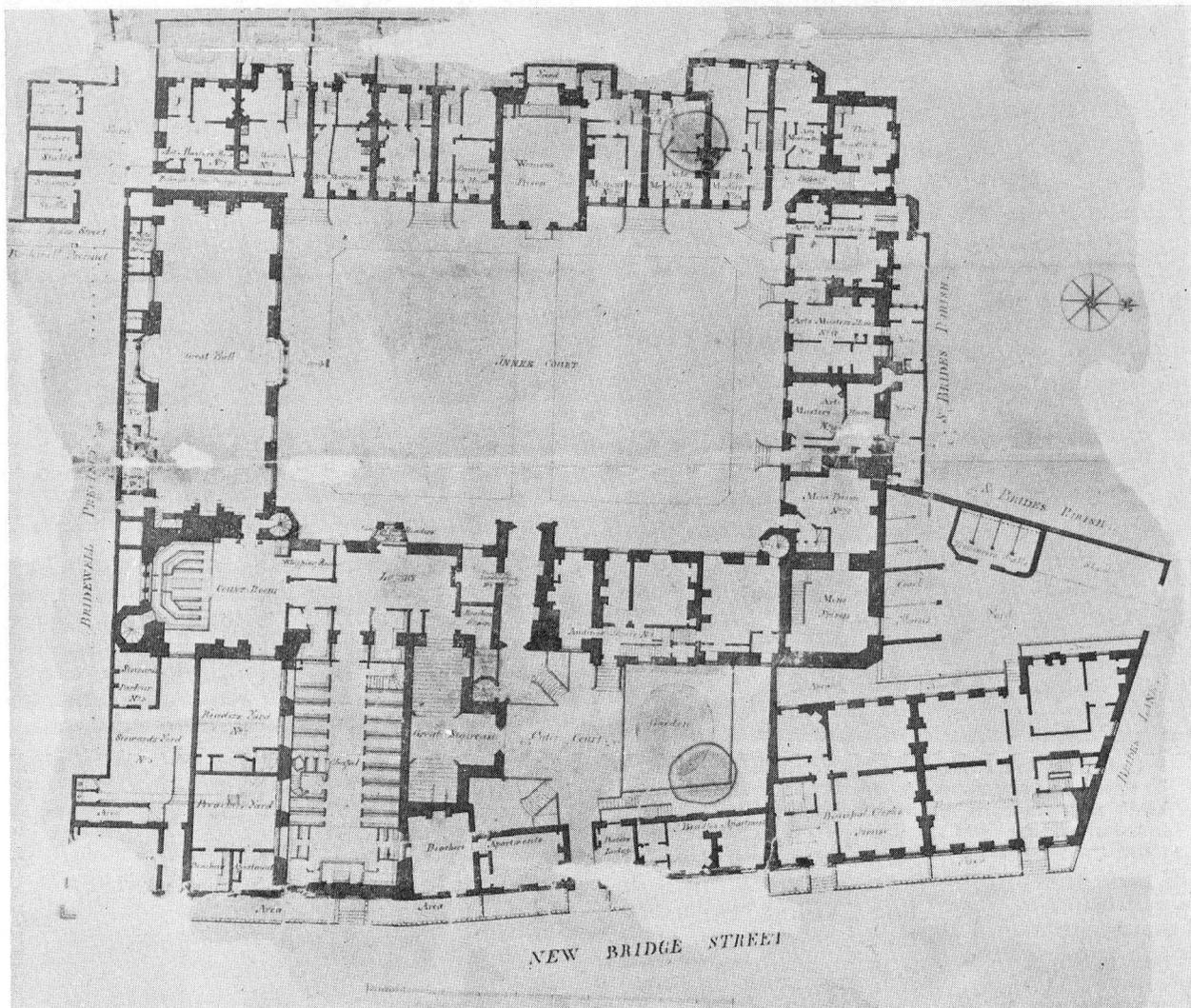


Fig. 3: The detailed survey of 1791 by which time much rebuilding had taken place and the southern courtyard which would have been off the page (to the left) had disappeared completely.

southern courtyard. This type of double courtyard layout is typical of Henry's palaces. To the east and north additional domestic buildings fronted onto the Fleet and Bride Lane forming a subsidiary courtyard.

1-3 Tudor Street

The evidence forthcoming from the Tudor Street watching brief consisted of several large fragments of brickwork, positioned in such a fashion as to suggest that a long gallery existed on the western side of the southern courtyard (Fig. 2), and as depicted on the maps of Agas and Hoefnagel.

Brick foundations on the western side of the site were carried on three arches running NS, whilst *c.*

11m (37ft) to the east two fragments of wall without arches, ran in parallel alignment (Fig. 2). Between the parallel lines, two further fragments of foundation arches were located, the first orientated WE and the second NS, both of which rested on 6in oak planking. The two parallel NS foundations indicate the west and east external walls of the long gallery, with the other arches representing intermediate foundations supporting some form of internal superstructural division (for which no other evidence survived). Insertion of modern sewers and concrete had removed further evidence for the southward extension of the gallery, but at the southern end of the site foundations were observed orientated WE, which might represent the remains

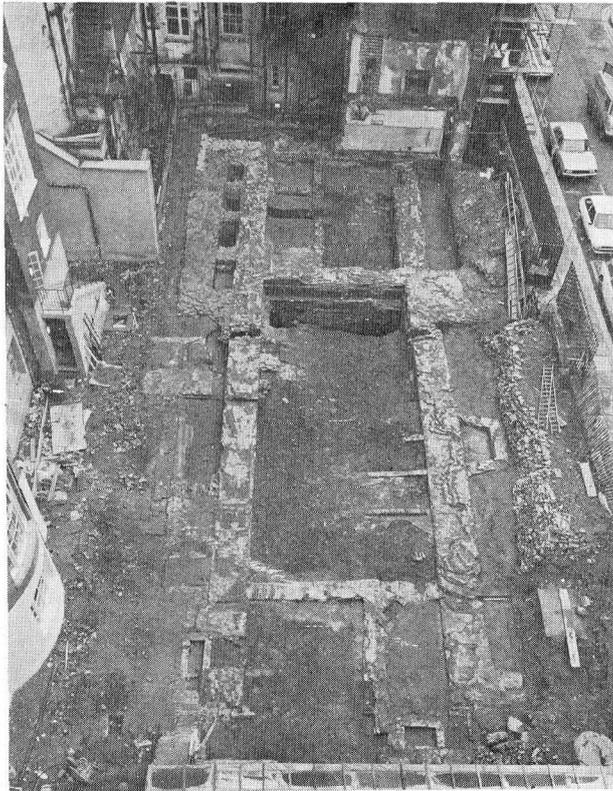


Fig. 4: The 9-11 Bridewell Place site looking south. The two walls running the length of the site parallel to each other are those of the palace. The arched foundations are just visible in the machine-cut trench.

(Photo: John Bailey)

of a structure associated with the “two towers upon Thames” mentioned above (see Fig. 2).

The area associated with the mouth of the Fleet had been subject — possibly from an early period — to reclamation, and the archaeology at Tudor Street has shown that from at least early medieval times this practice was in operation. Leake’s map of the City drawn in December 1666, shows an extensive area on the western side of the Fleet mouth, sufficient to create room for the southern range of Bridewell Palace, which other evidence from Tudor Street demonstrates to be reclaimed land. This circumstance is supplemented by the remains of a substantial stone wall “Old Fleet Wall”, (located during internal alterations to Blackfriars House undertaken in 1973), which probably represents a revetment at the limit of the reclamation (see Fig. 2).

9-11 Bridewell Place

The excavation revealed the foundations of both walls of the southern end of the range on the east side of the principal courtyard (Fig. 4). The short



Fig. 5: The foundations of a polygonal stair turret with its Reigate stone dressing. The palace wall is top right and the 17th century rebuild which “housed-in” the stair turret is bottom left.

(Photo: John Bailey)

length of wall running parallel to and just outside the original wall (at top left in Fig. 4) is a seventeenth century rebuild. It “housed-in” a polygonal stair turret (Fig. 5), complete with its Reigate stone dressing, which would have originally been a symmetrical projection. On the west side of the site

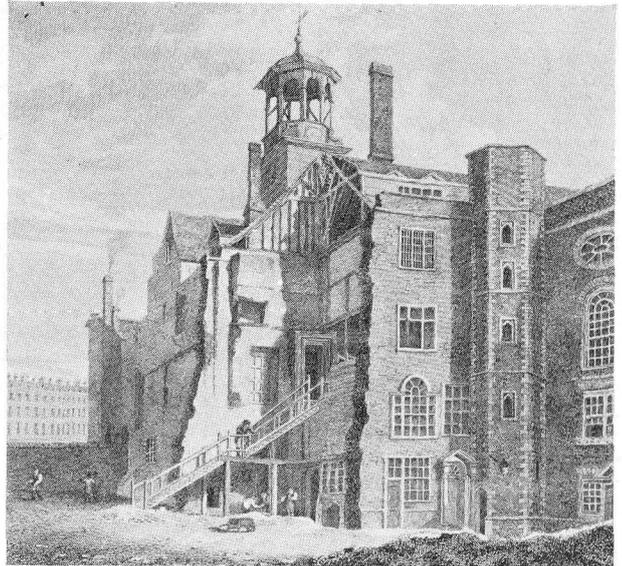


Fig. 6: This engraving made in 1806 looks SE and is in effect a “cut away” drawing of the part of the palace whose foundations were excavated on the 9-11 Bridewell Place site. The viewpoint is in the principal courtyard with the Great Hall on the right with the stair turret and the two partially demolished walls those located on the site. Note the belfry (centre) which can also be seen above the Grand Staircase in Fig. 1.

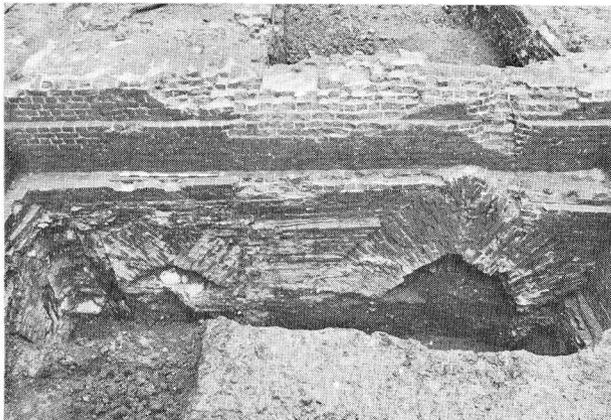


Fig. 7: The massive arched foundations of the palace walls were trench-built from the offset on which the scale is placed and never exposed in this fashion. Note the shoring plank on the extreme left.

(Photo: Jenny Orsmond)

the foundations of another stair turret were located also much cut away, but courses of bricks placed diagonally to the predominant orientation marked the start of the lowermost steps of the spiral staircase. This staircase, situated in the SE corner of the principal courtyard, is the one featured in an engraving of 1806 (Fig. 6) at which date it still retained its original fabric unlike the surrounding walls with their haphazard collection of Georgian windows in a by then much dilapidated palace.

The foundational technique employed was extremely elaborate, no doubt in response to the unstable nature of the river silts and the reclamation dumping on which the palace was built. Documentary evidence indicated that the land had hitherto been waste-land, occasionally cultivated, but continually needing building up by dumping to prevent flooding from the rising level of the Thames. A machine-cut section through these pre-palace deposits was entirely consistent with that sequence. It was found that several walls were built up from brick arches almost 1m (about 3ft) across and with a span of 3m (nearly 10ft) (Fig. 7). Some but not all of these arches were sprung off "piles" made up of a timber-lined shaft up to 3m deep into which chalk blocks had been rammed. These arched foundations had been trench built and in some cases the "former" for the arch had been created by leaving a hump in the bottom of the foundation trench (that on the right in Fig. 7) and making up the correct shape with a little sand. The "former" for the arch on the left was made up of chalk blocks and sand. Above the foundation level the brickwork was well made in English bond with wide mortar joints changing to English cross bond in some of the up-



Fig. 8: The original surface of the principal courtyard can be seen between the palace wall and the spoil-heap on the right.

(Photo: Trevor Hurst)

per courses. The bricks were typical of the period; bright red in colour, without a frog and having average dimensions of 2in x 4in x 8½in (50 x 100 x 215mm). The walls themselves were over 1m (3ft 3in) thick. The only original surface to have survived later cellaring was that of the principal courtyard (Fig. 8). It was of brick set on edge in a loose matrix and was found to be sealed by a burnt layer. This was likely to be the result of one of the many major fires, including that of 1666, known to have engulfed the palace buildings.

The most unusual architectural feature was the Grand Staircase (Fig. 2). Later drawings and plans show its construction embodied several Tudor Gothic motifs, but its attribution as original was uncertain until the excavation revealed its foundations, where they joined those of the main palace walls. As such it is one of the earliest staircases in England to be designed for state occasions. The Grand Staircase would have given access to the first floor on which all the most important rooms were situated. Alongside it a gateway constituted the main entrance to

the principal courtyard. From the cartographic evidence and the small section of its foundations uncovered at the extreme north end of the site this seems to have been a modest structure; it is shown as no more than a small plain doorway on the later prints and drawings (Fig. 1). This represents a marked change of emphasis in the mode of entrance at Bridewell by comparison with Henry's other palaces where the norm is an exaggerated gatehouse flanked by projecting turrets and with internal access to the first floor.

Bridewell, like all Tudor palaces, would have been laid out with two separate sequences of apartments — one for the King and one for the Queen — as well as a hall, chapel and the usual

domestic areas, kitchen, servants quarters, etc. The repair account of 1534 makes it clear that the King's lodgings were at the north end of the Long Gallery, i.e. on the western side of the principal courtyard. The rooms in the excavated area would then have been either part of the Queen's apartments or the domestic quarters. On the 1791 survey a large chapel is shown backing onto the Grand Staircase. The excavation showed that this was a later feature, associated with the seventeenth century rebuild, but an original predecessor was revealed on a more northerly line. This formed a long narrow room no more than 4m (13ft) wide behind the Grand Staircase but it would seem unlikely that this had served as a chapel in the original building.

*"Thus fortune can toss the World,
A Prince's court is thus a prison now."*
Dekker, *ibid.*

Excavations & Post-Excavation work

City, by Museum of London. Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to Alison Balfour-Lynn, DUA, 71 Basinghall Street, E.C.2. (01-606 1933/4/5). For information on post-excavation work, contact Penny MacConnoran at this address.

Brentford, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Excavation and processing. Enquiries to Alison Parnum, 71-72 Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Sandford Manor, Rewell Street (New Kings Road), S.W.6. Excavation work in grounds of 17th century house, traceable back to at least 14th century, hopefully will find medieval and earlier occupation. Enquiries to Excavation Director, C. E. Oliver, 18 Albany Court, Ashburnham Road, Ham, Richmond, Surrey. (01-948 2633) or K. Whitehouse.

Fulham Palace, Bishops Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Examination of existing buildings and research work has revealed earlier buildings underneath. Sundays and some weekdays. Enquiries to Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

Blakes/Redline/Esso and Rosebank Wharves, Stevenage Road, S.W.6. Urgent rescue work during redevelopment for housing is producing evidence for occupation during Neolithic and medieval times. Some weekdays and Saturdays. Enquiries to Keith Whitehouse (as above).

Hammersmith, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of prehistoric finds from Blakes Wharves and medieval material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays, 7.30 p.m. - 10 p.m., at Fulham Palace, Bishops Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Contact: Keith Whitehouse (see Fulham).

Inner London Boroughs, by the Inner London Unit. Several rescue sites in various areas. Enquiries to Irene Schwab (01-242 6620).

Kingston, by Kingston-upon-Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Smith, Kingston Museum, Fairfield Road, Kingston (01-546 5386).

North-East Greater London, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

Putney, by Wandsworth Historical Society. Two acre site at junction of Felsham Road and High Street lies on Roman and medieval settlements. Alternate weekends. Enquiries to Nicholas Farrant, 7 Coalecroft Road, S.W.15. (01-788 0015).

Southwark, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee. Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Harvey Sheldon, S.L.A.E.C., Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, S.E.1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Society. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey.

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Excavation at weekends only. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. All enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17. (01-703 3324).

GENERAL EXCAVATIONS

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of fieldwork. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £3.00 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E.11.